

681 sanction of the recognized marriage ceremonies were ostracized to
 684 the extent of having to live outside of the village stockade or, if
 736 they belonged to a community living in a single village-house, they
 were required to occupy a room detached from the main building.

681 The two other classes of ostracized persons, namely, widows and
 761 orphans, were supposed to have incurred the displeasure of their
 774 "Bgha," and it was feared that their misfortune would become contagious if they were allowed to remain in the village. That is, the "Bgha" of other families would imitate the "Bgha" of the widows' and orphans' families in eating the "k'las" of other husbands and parents, thus depriving the village of more of its members. It was believed that this danger could be avoided by driving the bereft ones into the jungle to shift for themselves. The added risk of the future marriage of these baneful persons was taken into account. This was perhaps negligible in the case of the widows, but the orphans should not be allowed to grow up with other children to become in time eligible for marriage with them. Left to range through the jungle, such orphans, if they survived, generally developed a daring and resourcefulness that inspired the ordinary folk of the village with wonder. Their deeds came to be thought of as due to a supernatural power. In short, they were believed to be magicians.⁴

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FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

595 In the chapter on Marriage Customs mention is made of the
 587 general chastity of the Karen and of their monogamous marriages within the tribe. The rule is for a man to have one wife; but now and then a secondary wife or concubine, known as a "ma po tha," is supported. It may be that on account of the childlessness of the first wife the new connection has been entered into for the sake of offspring, or that the man has simply followed his own inclinations in the matter. Such unions are effected without the formality of marriage ceremonies and are not recognized by Karen society, being entirely irregular.

584 Westerners, accustomed as they are to doing their own courting, sometimes wonder how happy marriages can be effected in the case of young men and women who are strangers and have never met perhaps till they come together in the marriage chamber. We must remember, however, that with a people like the Karen the physical relationship is more significant than the spiritual. 'Senti-

⁴ See Chapter XXVI, pp. 268-270.

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ment cuts little or no figure in the arrangement. The parties to a marriage expect to live together and take the affair as a matter of course. At the beginning they have no affection for each other, but through parenthood they become united in mutual love and, as the years pass while their family grows up about them, they are bound together as securely as if they had married in the Occidental and more romantic way. 584

In a Karen family children are desired and expected. To grow old and remain childless is regarded as a great misfortune. Boys are much preferred, but girls are not disliked as much as in China and some other parts of the world where they are abandoned. The child early accompanies its mother to the field or wherever she may go. In infancy it is slung in a blanket on her back, but later rides on her hip until long after it is able to walk. (See page 172.) 842
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Family relationships are not neglected among the Karen people, although they do not seem to keep genealogical records or to remember ancestors back of their grandparents. However, they are particular in taking account of, and displaying regard for, their contemporary relatives. The grandfather and grandmother, both paternal and maternal, are called "hpü" and "hpi," respectively. Great uncles and great aunts receive the same designations. The father and mother are, respectively, "pa" and "mo." Children are called "hpo," the root of this word meaning "little." Sons are "hpo hkwa" and daughters, "hpo mü." Contrary to the Occidental custom of grouping brothers and sisters according to sex, a Karen ordinarily groups them according to whether they are younger or older than himself. Older brothers and sisters are "weh" and younger "hpü." If he desires to specify whether they are male or female, he employs the usual masculine and feminine designations, commonly adding one or the other of the words given above for son and daughter. Thus, for elder sister he says "weh hpo mü" and for younger brother "hpü hpo hkwa." While there are definite words for cousin, uncle, and aunt, namely, "t'khwa," "hpa hti," and "mügha," respectively, these are often loosely used. Any man or woman older than one's self may be called uncle or aunt as, for example, among the negroes in the United States. The word "weh," signifying older brothers and sisters, as also the correlative word "hpü," designating younger brothers and sisters, are often used of cousins and more distant relatives. For instance, a cousin, called "weh," is usually one whose father or mother was an older brother or sister to one of the speaker's parents. "Hpü" would similarly 601

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vented from enjoying a good night's rest by the number of other occupants. My cook prepared my meals at the little fireplace in the middle of the room. The villagers sat about and visited with us. When meal-time came the women and girls brought in their generous supplies of food, consisting of two large trays piled high with snow-white steaming rice, besides smaller trays and bowls filled with several kinds of curry, "ngape" water, and vegetables. The visitors were expected to eat something from every dish. While the meal was in progress the hosts withdrew, except one or two elders, the women returning afterwards to clear away the dishes and uneaten food with the polite remark that their guests had eaten very little. Many shared in receiving us; and we were spared the embarrassment, not to say the danger according to our belief, of violating the tabu that prevented our being entertained at the time by a family in their own quarters.

Besides serving as a guest-chamber, the "blaw" has another important use, namely, as the gathering-place for the young men of the village. When a boy becomes a youth ("hpo tha hkwa tau"), he is expected to spend his leisure time in his parents' room, working and eating with them, as seems to be the custom. When evening comes, he repairs to the "blaw" to be with his fellows and to sleep there. This is a custom that is common among the Kachins of Burma and many other tribes of the Orient. Among the Kachins the "blaw" is a place of license. The Brechs also allow a great deal of liberty to their young people, and evidently advantage of it is taken by them. But among the Sgaw Karens, at any rate, the girls remain with their mothers. There is no common room for the girls, or any place where both youths and maidens may meet for restrained intercourse. No doubt among the Karen the use of the "blaw" as a club-room is for the purpose of keeping the young men together and separating them from the young women, thus preventing offence of the "by na," which would bring a curse upon the soil and damage to the crops.

It has never been possible for parents to prevent all social intercourse between young people of the opposite sexes. In fact, it has hardly ever been attempted. As is shown elsewhere in this volume, there are occasions among the Karen when the sexes mingle, for example, on fishing expeditions and at marriages, funerals, etc. If, however, a youth desires to visit a maiden, etiquette prescribes the way: he must take his harp ("t'na"), appear before her house, and serenade her. Sitting down, he sings to the accom-

(ie. not being allowed in family rooms during the
daytime -- An 2145c)

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paniment of his instrument. If she replies to his request to be permitted to visit with her, she does so on the jew's-harp ("t'xe"), answering him in verse. He then mounts the ladder and they visit together, either singing over "htas" already familiar to them or, if skilled in improvising, putting their own thoughts into rhyme. If too long an interval should elapse without the sound of either instrument, the elders would very likely put in an appearance to find out the reason.

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SLAVERY

Slavery no longer exists among the Karen; but when it did, it was incidental to war. The British acquisition of Lower Burma during the thirty years before 1886 brought with it the cessation of village raids and tribal conflicts in which the captives taken might, and frequently did, become slaves. Such captives were treated according to the changing whims of their masters. When first brought in they might be harangued by the leader of the victorious war-band, in case he chose to denounce them for starting the war and to recount all the alleged or real wrongs they and their people had inflicted upon him and his village. The proof of their guilt lay in their capture. While being kept in captivity they were subject to rough treatment, such as beating and wounds, which might be preliminary to their being killed. If they were spared and not redeemed within a short time, they were either kept as slaves or sold to traders, who might be other Karens or Shans. Old people were not marketable, and it was difficult to find buyers for them at any price. Men and women in the prime of life, that is, between the ages of thirty and forty years, brought about one hundred rupees each; young men and maidens, approximately three hundred rupees each, and boys and girls from twelve to fifteen years, who were considered the most valuable, sold for four hundred rupees each. Such prices did not always prevail, for Mr. Mason in 1868 reported that once, when he was in Karenni, he saw two Shan women brought in and sold at fourteen rupees apiece.

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While slavery was a recognized institution among the Karen, it does not seem to have become a rigid system.* When the captives were redeemed, they returned to their previous status of

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* This mild form of slavery, which we find previously existing among the Karen, seems rather general among some of the other peoples in the neighboring regions, as in *Borneo: see How and MacDougal, Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. I, 71, 8, and Cole, *Wild Tribes of the Davao District of the Philippine Islands*, 99, 102.

CHAPTER XIX

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

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582 In the early days it appears that a young man did not marry until he was twenty-five or thirty years of age. His parents, deciding that it was about time for him to have a wife, either arranged with the parents of some maiden or, as was more often the case, confided in some friendly elder and entrusted the matter to him. If they had a preference, they made it known; but not infrequently the mediator was permitted to select whomsoever he might think best. It made no difference whether the young persons had ever met or not. When the subject was broached to them, they usually consented; but if they refused, as they seem to have done sometimes, the proposed arrangement was dropped. The mediator in such an affair was known as the "t' lo pa."

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621 Up to a generation or two ago marriage between a Karen and a member of another race was altogether tabu. This explains why the Karen have maintained their traditions and their social solidarity to so remarkable a degree. Moreover, it was an almost invariable rule among the Karen that the young woman should belong to the same tribe as the youth. Even to this day one who marries into another tribe is looked at a little askance and is spoken of as having married outside ("pgha htaw leu hko"). It was not uncommon for relatives, usually second or third cousins, to wed. First cousins very rarely married. In Shewegyin if a girl was a relative of the man, she must belong to his generation, that is, they must be first, second, or third cousins, as the case might be. She might be an inhabitant of the same village as her spouse or of another. While it was more common for the parents of the young man to begin the negotiations for a wedding, it was not a rare occurrence for the parents of a girl of marriageable age to begin them.

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582 Child betrothals were not uncommon in the early days. Two families, who were on very intimate terms and desirous of prolonging their intimacy indefinitely, would arrange to have their children marry. Even young couples, who as yet had no children, would agree that, if favored by fortune, a marriage should take place be-

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tween their hoped-for offspring, although such an agreement might be made at any time during the growth of the children. Such a pact was considered firmly binding on those concerned. The children might or might not be told of the arrangement. Later on, at any rate, the youth would learn of it; and it was expected, when the proper time came, that he would seek out his betrothed, even if she was then living in a distant village. Thra Than Bya tells of a couple who were thus affianced while living on the banks of the Irrawaddy River. During hard times the girl's parents removed from one place to another, until at length they settled near Moulmein. When the youth had reached man's estate, his father told him of his engagement and sent him to seek his betrothed. Knowing only her name and that of her father, he traced them from village to village until, arriving at the place where they then dwelt, the chief confirmed the fact and consented to the young man's entering into a rhyming contest with the maiden, when she should arrive at the feast that was being held there. Retiring into the jungle, the youth got himself up in disheveled array, returned, and addressed the damsel in poetic language, explaining briefly his mission. She repelled his attentions; but he persisted, saying that she belonged to him by right of their childhood betrothal. Thereupon she besought her parents to save her from such an undesirable husband. They imposed the condition that she should surpass him in the rhyming contest. Failing in the attempt, she humbled herself and invited him to her house, where her parents proceeded to celebrate her wedding with a great feast.¹

Feasts, especially funeral-feasts, were the occasions at which youths and maidens met. They used to go to such gatherings in companies, each with its leader who was skilled in reciting or extemporizing simple verses. Being thus thrown together, couples often became engaged, pledging themselves in verses like the following:

Youth: "I promise you, you promise me.
We have promised each other."

Maiden: "After you have promised me and do not come,
Cotton will grow on your grave.
If you agree and do not come,
Paddy will grow over your tomb."

¹ In the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1866, Dr. Huxley mentions similar customs as existing among the Karen of Yunnan.

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Youth: "We are pledging each other before the dead.
We shall not be worthy of offspring."

If later during the same festival either one of the pair wished to break the betrothal, they addressed each other in verse, saying:

"We promise each other in rhyme.

Now let us speak verse again.

May evil not come upon us,

Or upon our descendants."

Such verses are called "hta thi kwaw." Unless an engagement thus made was broken off the same night, the young man was under obligation to send a mediator to arrange for the wedding within a short time. If he failed to keep his pledge, his strength to resist an evil charm ("so"), would lapse, and he would go, it was thought, into a decline.

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Many of these practices still obtain among the Karen in the outlying hill-country; and in choosing a bride no step would be taken without divination by the customary method of inspecting the chicken bones, except in the case of the betrothals effected by the young people themselves at the funeral-feasts. It sometimes happens that a young man, seeing a maiden who attracts him, mentions the circumstance to his parents, who approve his choice and send a mediator to her parents with an offer of marriage. As the services of a confidant are required sooner or later in nearly all cases, the omens are consulted and must prove favorable before he proceeds on his mission.² If on his way he should chance on anything that is inauspicious, such as the gliding of a snake across his path, the barking of a deer, or the report of a death, he will return home. Otherwise, he continues his journey to the house of the young woman's parents. The conversation that takes place there is carried on in verse characterized by figures of speech which suggest, but do not state explicitly, the purpose for which the mediator came. On entering the house, he sighs, perhaps, and remarks that he is in a trying position. The parents inquire what the matter is, and he answers with a couplet:

[539] "Give me a white pullet,
And I shall feel better."

² See Chapter XXVII, pp. 288, 2.

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The parents apprehend that he is asking for their daughter.
If not ready to give her in marriage, they may answer:

"This white pullet we have but raised;
Never once has she cackled."

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THE FUNERAL OF THE BARRACKS
Except for the youth with the wedding horn, they are using Burmese instruments on which they are practicing preparatory to the wedding ceremony on the morrow.

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The hint is sufficient, and the mediator promptly makes his
adieu in plainer speech:

"You have not received me. Do not revile me.
The youth's parents will keep their son."

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You did not consent, but you spoke kindly.
As for me, I am not discouraged."

In case, however, the parents are favorably inclined, but are in doubt as to who the young man may be, knowing that their caller has a son of his own, they ask him:

"Do you come on your own legs,
Or on those of another?"

He replies:

"On the legs of another."

Or they may be uncertain as to whether he intends his offer of marriage for their maiden daughter or the older one, an eligible young widow. So they ask him:

"Are you crossing a flat bridge or a round one?"

The expression "flat bridge" refers to the young widow, the other to the maiden. A "round bridge" is a log, for in the jungle a bridge is commonly nothing more than a log. A flat bridge is one made of planks. The significance of the two expressions as applied by the parents is obscure to me, but is subject to several interpretations. If there should be two unmarried daughters in the family, both eligible, the parents would inquire:

"Have you come for a basket of rice
Or only for a mortarful?"

The basket, being the larger receptacle refers to the older and, presumably, larger maiden.²

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During his first call the mediator does not expect to progress far in his negotiations. If he has been favorably received, the family may kill a chicken and invite him to eat with them. He departs without knowing what the outcome will be, and the parents find an early opportunity to get the consent of their unmarried daughter to become a married woman ("mū pgha").

On his second visit a few days later the intermediary may find the father sitting at the front of the house and probably overhears him call out to the mother at one of her tasks within: "Here comes that male buffalo. Shall we tether him or let him go?" If she shouts back: "We might as well tether him," he knows that his proposal will be accepted. Even should she reply to the contrary, the caller would enter the house and pay his visit, but would make

² The Karens often use the word "larger" in referring to an older child.

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no reference to the object of the call. This whole procedure illustrates not only a Karen, but also an Oriental, trait of character. The Oriental deals in indirect methods, rather than run the risk of saying something disagreeable. 584

Realizing that his mission is not in vain, the intermediary enters the house of the prospective bride's parents in joyous mood, fairly shouting the Karen version of "tra-la-la," which is "traw-le, wa-le, ho-o-o." They sit down and discuss the matter. Then the parents kill a fowl or a pig, and the guest stays for dinner in token that the bargain is sealed. After the date for the wedding-feast has been set, the intermediary returns to the young man's family and reports his success. As a rule the time of the feast is fixed by the maiden's parents, but it is sometimes determined by the youth's family.

The only month that is tabu for wedding-feasts is "La plü" (December). This is the month when the moon is most often eclipsed (swallowed by the dogs). To many the month seems as though it were killed and is, therefore, regarded as inauspicious for new life. Others say that it is the month when neither birds nor animals mate, and that it is unwise for men to undertake to start a new household. The favorite months for marriages are March and April in the dry season, because the harvest is past, the weather is good, and there is plenty to eat and drink. The date of the wedding must fall during the waxing of the moon, which augurs an increasing family. This important point being settled, the prospective bride busies herself less with the preparation of her own trousseau than with the weaving of a set of new garments for her future husband, including a white turban, a white blanket with a red stripe running through it lengthwise, and, in the olden days, a "hse plo" or single smock. The maiden's family prepare the rice, fish-paste, pork, and liquor for the feast. The prospective groom has only to make for himself a horn to be blown at the festivities. On the plains and in those places in the hills where each family has its separate house, a booth or "k'la pyeh" is built close at hand for the wedding-feasts. This structure must be so placed as to have its entrance towards the tail of the "p'yo" or great dragon of the Karens. Not long ago I saw such a booth, which was enclosed on three sides and had a small open entrance to the east. The south side was entirely open. Access to the structure was had 585
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*This booth is often called a "mound." The name, "k'la pyeh," is from the Burmese. Perhaps the booth itself is of Burmese origin, but I do not know.